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ABSTRACT

Although child development laboratory programs continue to be important players in the child development and early childhood arenas, these programs face a number of emerging issues and challenges as they seek to solidify their support on campuses nationwide. Child development lab programs have been charged to serve as: (1) sites for personnel training in child development and early childhood education; (2) research sites; and (3) leaders in local, state, and national early childhood communities. Presently, many university-based child development lab programs are faced with threatened cutbacks or closures, due to the shrinking resources available at most state colleges and universities, the blurring of the roles and missions of lab programs, and the low priority placed by society on the education and training of child-care providers. Despite these trends, two phenomena are reviving interest in child development lab programs: the increased demand for child care at a time of serious concern over the quality, availability, and affordability of such programs; and the recent emphasis placed on research examining child development within individual, family, community, and societal contexts. Four interrelated issues need to be addressed to build support for these programs; (1) expanding program services; (2) reevaluating personnel training functions; (3) revitalizing model programs/leadership activities; and (4) expanding research opportunities. (Contains 18 references.) (AC)

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UNIVERSITY-BASED CHILD DEVELOPMENT LABORATORY PROGRAMS: EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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University-Based Child Development Laboratory Programs: Emerging Issues and Challenges

University-based child development laboratory programs for preschool aged children have a long and rich history. From their inception in the early 1920's they have played a vital role in adding to our ever expanding knowledge base on child development and early childhood education. As outlined by Osborn (1991), it was in these early university-based programs that much of the beginning research on child development emerged: Iowa Growth Curves (Meredith); norms for development (Gesell at Yale); intelligence tests (Kuhlmann at Minnesota; Stutsman at Merrill-Palmer); IQ studies (Wellman & Skeels at Iowa, Goodenough at Minnesota); early studies of children's play (Parten at Minnesota).

Although child development laboratory programs continue to be important players in the child development and early childhood education arenas, many are being asked to provide justification for their continued existence. The purpose of this paper is to identify emerging issues and challenges facing these programs as they seek to solidify their support on campuses nationwide.

The Role of Child Development Laboratory Programs

As child development laboratory programs for young children (hereafter referred to as CD lab programs) started to emerge in the early 1920's, a three-part mission articulating their role on university campuses began to evolve (Osborn, 1991). This three-part mission served as the cornerstone for CD lab programs, and guided all aspects of their services and activities. Under this mission CD lab programs have been charged to: 1. serve as a site for personnel training in child development and early childhood education; 2. serve as a site for research on various

aspects of child development and early childhood education; and 3. serve in a model program/leadership role for the local, state, and national early childhood communities. By addressing this three-part mission lab school staff members have played instrumental roles in articulating the interconnections between theory, research, and practice in the early childhood field.

Unlike demonstration programs associated with normal schools/schools of teacher education whose missions have historically fluctuated (Buck et al., 1991), CD lab programs have always maintained an emphasis on all three aspects of their mission (Osborn, 1991). A glance at a recent issue of the *Membership Directory of the National Organization of Child Development Laboratory Schools* (NOCDLS, 1989) suggests that a majority of these programs report that they address all three parts of this mission. Whether programs can effectively address all three parts of this mission equally has come under scrutiny in recent years, with proponents on both sides of the debate (Townley & Zeece, 1991). The ability to do so has become even more critical in recent years as a growing gap between theory, research, and practice has been identified in the early childhood education profession (Powell, in press). By equally addressing all three parts of their mission, university-based CD lab programs can play instrumental roles in reducing this gap. In order to achieve this they must adapt to emerging issues and challenges.

Challenges Facing Child Development Laboratory Programs

At the present time many university-based CD lab programs are being faced with threatened cutbacks and/or closures. These cutbacks have occurred at the same time that a new form of university-based program serving young children has begun to emerge (i.e., campus child care programs). Although there has been a rapid expansion in the availability of campus child

care facilities (Keyes, 1991), these programs have a distinct purpose which is different from that of CD lab programs (Shirah, 1988). With this increase in campus child care programs, many CD lab schools are finding it increasingly difficult to continue addressing their three-part mission. A variety of factors have contributed to this growing problem.

A major challenge contributing to the decreasing support for CD lab programs has been the shrinking resource base available at most state colleges and universities. State supported institutions of higher education are in the midst of a financial crisis, with little hope for a turn around in the immediate future (Adams & Palmer, 1993). This crisis has put most CD lab programs in direct competition for shrinking resources with other units on their campuses. CD lab programs tend to be resource intensive (personnel, financial, and facility wise), and it becomes increasingly difficult to justify the allocation of scarce resources to these programs during lean times. Thus, support for CD lab programs may be lacking when the budget ax falls on campuses nationwide.

A second challenge contributing to the decreased support for CD lab programs has been the blurring of the roles and missions associated with such efforts. Historically the study of child development has cut across many different units on major university campuses (e.g., home economics, psychology, education, social work, nursing). There has also been a great amount of debate and tension as to who should train/educate child care providers, who should support research facilities for studying children, and who should support laboratory programs themselves. During times of financial crisis this blurring of roles has created a situation in which many units on campus may be competing for the same limited resources earmarked for the same purposes. As a result, CD lab programs find themselves without a consistent resource base to support their

operations.

A final challenge that has historically contributed to the decreased support for CD lab programs is the low priority placed by society on the education and training of child care providers, and for research on child development, child care, and early childhood education. A walk across most major campuses will provide evidence of this low priority. The majority of resources tend to be directed towards programs in engineering, business and commerce, computer sciences, etc. as opposed to programs for children. Those funds that do get directed towards programs for children tend to be for campus child care facilities. CD lab programs also find themselves limited in being able to generate external funds for their initiatives. External funds going into these programs fall short of that which supports lab programs in life sciences, engineering, etc.

The challenges facing CD lab schools outlined above have played a major role in the decreased support for many such programs. A review of the records of the National Organization of Child Development Laboratory Schools indicates that membership in this organization has dropped in recent years (NOCDLS, 1989). Educators have also identified an alarming trend in the decreasing number of lab school programs nationwide (VanTill, 1987). Although this is a concern for those who value the role that such programs play in bridging theory, research, and practice for the early childhood profession, there is hope on the horizon. Several shifts in societal thinking have occurred in recent years which have placed a renewed focus on CD lab programs.

Renewed Interest in Child Development Laboratory Programs

Two phenomena have occurred in recent years that have placed a renewed focus on the

roles of CD lab programs on college and university campuses. The first such phenomenon is the crisis situation facing the child care field. Changing demographics of our society have created an ever increasing demand for nonparental child care programs. The 1990 census data suggests that 57% of the children age five and under had mothers who worked outside the home (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990). With this increase in maternal employment comes an increased need for child care programs. The U.S. Department of Labor (1988) has projected a 44% increase in the number of jobs available in the child care field during the 1990's as opposed to a 23% increase in the general labor force.

This increased demand for nonparental child care comes at a time when there is serious concern over the quality, availability, and affordability of such programs. The child care field is truly in a crisis state (Howes & Hamilton, 1993): high quality programs are scarce; wages paid providers are low; staff members are poorly trained; working conditions are stressful; and staff turnover rates are high (approximately 45-50%/year). This crisis situation has led to a great amount of concern over the impact of nonparental care on child development. Research attempting to address this concern is also a hotly debated topic as inconsistencies in the findings and criticisms of the methodologies employed in examining the impact of child care have been expressed (McCartney & Rosenthal, 1991; Belsky & Eggebeen, 1991).

A second phenomenon that has created a renewed interest in the roles of CD lab programs has been the recent emphasis placed on research examining child development within individual, family, community, and societal contexts (Pence, 1988). Researchers, educators, and policy makers alike have begun to question the validity and relevancy of developmental research conducted in tightly controlled, 8' x 10' laboratory settings. This is especially true for early

childhood educators. Child development does not occur in a contextual vacuum, and the flaws in trying to generalize lab study findings to a broader context are beginning to emerge.

CD lab programs are in a unique position to address issues and concerns raised by these two recent phenomena. By effectively addressing all three parts of their mission they can: add to the knowledge base of our understanding of child care as a developmental context; provide a ready source of well trained educators to improve the quality and availability of nonparental child care; provide model programs which demonstrate best practices for the local, state, and national early childhood communities; and provide an attractive site for the implementation of developmental research that moves beyond the context of 8' x 10' laboratory settings.

CD lab programs must first step back and seriously assess the challenges facing their programs before they can begin to effectively address these concerns. Several critical issues can be identified as CD lab programs strive to build support for their programs.

Critical Issues In Building Support for Child Development Laboratory Programs

Four critical issues need to be addressed as CD lab programs strive to build support for their programs while focussing on all three parts of their mission: expanding program services; reevaluating personnel training functions; revitalizing model programs/leadership activities; and expanding research opportunities. The first of these would be to expand program services to more closely match a real world model. The historical perspective of CD lab program services is that of half day preschool classes for young children from predominantly white, highly educated, middle and upper class, two parent families. Although this model may have been appropriate in supporting the teaching, research, and service missions of lab programs in their early days, it is no longer applicable in the 1990's. Lab programs which continue to utilize this

model find themselves unable to make their programs attractive for the research, personnel training, and service activities which can effectively address the issues and concerns facing the child care and early education fields (Townley & Zeece, 1991). In failing to match their services to real world models, many CD lab programs are finding themselves unable to effectively address their three-part mission, and are thus becoming easy targets for cutbacks and closures.

Several potential directions for expanding services are available as CD lab programs begin to focus on providing initiatives that more closely match real world models. A first step in this direction could be to examine the feasibility of providing full day child care in addition to half day preschool classes. Very few families have the luxury of one parent staying at home, or one who has a flexible schedule that would allow for the shuttling of children between home, preschool classes, and a variety of other patchwork child care arrangements that attendance in these parttime programs require. Full day programs more closely match the child care needs of the majority of today's families, and are more in line with the types of programs which students who are being trained in CD lab facilities will be working in upon graduation. A variety of other potential directions for expanding services are available, including prekindergarten programs for at-risk children, before and after school care programs for school aged children, parent/family support programs, university-based Head Start programs, etc. A goal of these efforts would be to insure that CD lab programs encompass a diverse population of children, families, and staff members that are reflective of the real world.

A second critical issue which needs to be addressed as CD lab programs work on building their support base is an examination of how they approach their personnel training functions. A common problem facing many programs is the lack of continuity between what is being taught

in university courses and what is being done in the laboratory classrooms (Swick, 1988). This lack of continuity creates a great amount of confusion for the students, and a loss of credibility for both lab school staff members and university instructors. Related to this problem is the very narrow focus which most CD lab programs take when addressing the personnel training portion of their mission. Most programs address personnel training within the framework of their own sponsoring academic units, without acknowledging that a variety of departments across campus enroll students who work with and study children in a variety of contexts (e.g., kinesiology, nursing, social work, psychology). This lack of continuity between university courses and lab school practices, as well as the narrow focus in addressing personnel training make for a weak support base as CD lab programs try to justify their existence during tight economic times.

A variety of strategies can be employed as CD lab programs attempt to revitalize the ways in which they support personnel training and undergraduate education. A first step in this process would be to make the Director's position a tenure track faculty appointment (not always the case with many programs). Having a tenure track faculty person in the Director's position will create a closer link between the CD lab program initiatives and the teacher training, undergraduate education, and research efforts occurring across campus. This faculty appointment will also add more credibility to program initiatives, as well as provide a stronger voice for the lab in departmental, college, and campus-wide issues and discussions. A key in filling these kinds of Directors' positions would be to identify individuals who have a working knowledge of early childhood programs, as well as an appreciation of, commitment to, and the ability to facilitate the three-part mission of CD lab programs. A commitment by sponsoring academic units to these tenure track Directors' positions is also needed for the appointments to be successful. The

appointment of senior level faculty, or the creation of appointments for junior level faculty that are reflective of the administrative responsibilities of CD lab programs (e.g., reduced teaching loads, less committee assignments, etc.) are critical.

Once a tenure track faculty person has been appointed to the Director's position, he/she can begin to explore various initiatives which would allow the CD lab school to better address the personnel training and undergraduate education efforts of their programs. A variety of mechanisms could be put in place that would allow for better articulation between what is being taught in university classes and the practices being used in the lab school classrooms (e.g., CD lab staff members attending faculty meetings, faculty attending CD lab staff meetings; faculty conducting in-service training for CD lab staff, standardizing supervision models being used by faculty and CD lab staff). CD lab staff members could also be invited to do guest lectures in university classes as attempts are made to demonstrate for students the connections between theory, research, and practice.

A tenure track faculty Director can also play an instrumental role in identifying ways the lab program can develop outreach initiatives to inform the university community as to how they can help support undergraduate education through observational opportunities, class projects, practicum placements, etc. These outreach initiatives can take on a variety of forms such as brochures describing research, observation, and class project opportunities at the lab program, presentations at faculty meetings of other departments, informational pieces describing the CD lab for university publications, etc. By making a stronger link between program initiatives and the personnel training and undergraduate education efforts of the campus community, CD labs will be able to better justify their existence during tight economic times.

A third critical issue which needs to be addressed as CD lab programs strive to build their support base is an examination of how effectively they meet the model programs/ leadership portion of their mission. Program initiatives in CD lab schools should be on the cutting edge of what theory and research informs us are "best" practices in child care and early childhood education. CD lab staff members should also be well educated professionals who stay current with the issues and trends emerging in the early childhood field. Taken together, CD lab programs and staff members represent a collective wealth of expertise in the field of child care and early childhood education. Although this "expertise" is often shared with university students completing practicum placements in the lab programs, such efforts fall short in meeting the model programs/leadership portion of the mission for CD lab schools.

In order to effectively meet this portion of their mission CD lab program directors should have expectations for staff members to be involved in a variety of leadership activities. These activities include conducting workshops at conferences for early childhood educators, writing articles for newsletters and journals aimed at early childhood teachers, providing leadership for local early childhood programs and groups (e.g., boards of directors, officers), providing service for local early childhood programs (e.g., consulting, technical assistance), and providing professional service for the early childhood field (e.g., validators for the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs of NAEYC, CDA advisors). It is through activities such as these that the collective expertise of CD lab staff members can be shared with the local, state, and national early childhood communities. These efforts will also allow CD lab programs to be looked upon as experts in the field, and will extend their range of influence beyond the classroom walls. In order to encourage these kinds of activities CD lab directors must implement a variety of

functions which can facilitate their development (e.g., release time and funds for travel, feedback mechanisms to help staff members develop skills, mentoring/support systems among staff members, appropriate rewards/recognition for professional leadership activities).

A final critical issue needing to addressed as CD lab programs work on building their support base is an examination of how they fulfill the research portion of their three-part mission. Although facilitating faculty and graduate student research has always been an important function of CD lab programs, it is typically one activity that is seldom implemented to its fullest potential. Several factors prevent programs from ever completely fulfilling this part of their mission, including: a lack of commitment to research by program staff members and/or directors; a lack of resources and technical expertise to help facilitate research agendas, a lack of interest in the lab program facilities and children by the university community; and the closed nature of many programs to research being conducted by investigators from outside the sponsoring academic unit. By not fulfilling the research aspect of their mission to its fullest potential, CD lab programs are again finding it difficult to justify their existence during tight economic times.

Several initiatives can be developed and implemented as CD lab schools focus on the research functions of their programs. First among these would be to make their programs and facilities attractive to researchers, both within and from outside the sponsoring unit (e.g., appropriate populations for study, facilities which allow for the implementation of studies, procedures to guide research project implementation). Involving staff members in the research process (e.g., reviewing proposals, assisting in project implementation, providing feedback to researchers) can also help facilitate this process. In addition, McBride (1992) and Horm-Wingerd and Cohen (1992) have developed procedures for standardizing the research process in lab

programs for young children (e.g., research request proposals, review committee procedures, criteria for evaluating research request proposals, training procedures to assist investigators in implementing research projects). These procedures can greatly enhance a program's ability to attract a wide variety of research projects from various units on campus. Finally, directors should develop and implement outreach efforts designed to inform the university community as to the types of research opportunities available at the CD lab programs. These efforts could include developing a "Research Opportunities" brochure for distribution, doing guest lectures for graduate research methods courses, and personal networking with other researchers across campus. By enhancing the research activities being conducted at their programs, CD lab schools can develop stronger justifications for their continued existence during times of economic difficulties on campuses.

Conclusions/Implications

As mentioned earlier, many CD lab programs are finding it more and more difficult to justify their existence on college and university campuses nationwide. Although they have historically played important roles in supporting the teaching, research, and service missions of their sponsoring units, they are increasingly being called upon to provide concrete evidence of returns on the resources invested in their programs. By addressing the four critical issues outlined earlier, CD lab schools can broaden their support base and provide solid justification for their continued existence.

A variety of benefits can be gained by CD lab programs when they strive to build their support base and focus on these four critical issues. CD lab programs which focus on these four issues will quickly find that expanding program services to more closely match real world

models, revamping the personnel training functions, expanding the model programs/ leadership activities, and expanding research opportunities are all intricately interwoven. Efforts made at addressing any one of the four issues will have parallel impacts on the other three. For example, by expanding their program services to more closely match real world models, CD lab programs will find that they have also created new research and personnel training opportunities, thus enhancing their potential for supporting these two parts of their mission. The creation of new research opportunities, expanding support for personnel training and undergraduate education campus wide, expanding the leadership role of staff members in the early childhood community, and drawing closer links between theory, research, and practice for both preservice and inservice early childhood educators are means by which CD lab programs can broaden their support base and further justify their existence during tight economic times at institutions of higher education.

CD lab programs are facing difficult times, and are constantly being asked to adapt to changes in the settings in which they exist. There is great concern about whether these programs will be able to continue the important roles they play in the early childhood profession. The National Organization of Child Development Laboratory Schools' preconference session for the upcoming 1994 NAEYC Annual Conference titled *Viability and Visibility* is indicative of this concern. The theme for this three hour session will be a critical discussion of the roles which CD lab programs play in preparing early childhood professionals, and how such programs can meet the demands of the multiple goals of laboratory schools. This session will bring together leaders in the field of CD lab schools as they seek ways to help programs more effectively meet their three-part missions. By focussing on efforts designed to help them more effectively fulfill this three-part mission, CD lab programs can insure their continued important roles in the child

care and early education professions.

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